

A KATY HIGH SCHOOL ICON

Patty Henson

The inside scoop from Katy High School's longtime director of the Bengal Brigade and Cheerleaders

Compiled by Shetye Cypher and Katy Magazine's Editors



Patty Henson has been the KBBC director for 34 years

Photo by Amanda Walton

In her 34 years directing Katy High School's Bengal Brigade and cheer teams, Patty Henson has coached more than 4,000 girls. Some of her former students are now dance team directors, cheer coaches, or Rockets, Texans, or Spurs cheerleaders. One of them was a background dancer for Beyoncé, and another is Academy Award-winning actress, Renée Zellweger.

Most Rewarding Aspects of the Job

"Watching my students enter as freshmen and mature into amazing young ladies, and a few gentlemen, who graduate with the pride and integrity of a Tiger! I am privileged to share in more than their advancement in dance or cheer, but in their lives. I wouldn't trade it... even on those really crazy days! I am also very fortunate to have made some amazing friends among the staff at Katy High School and with the parents I have worked with."

How the Program Has Evolved

"The Bengal Brigade started out as a drill team and now it's a dance team. Cheerleaders used to do forward rolls and cartwheels and now they build three story pyramids and full-down from it. Dance has gone from ripples and turns, to jazz leaps. From pom-routines to hip-hop. But through it all, the kids have remained the same: talented, eager, and inquisitive young adults."

Hometown Support

"We are blessed to have the small-town atmosphere in this ever-growing city of Katy. For example, when the softball team won state, we had the fire department and police department meet the team bus on its way into Katy at midnight to escort them to the stadium for a community pep rally."

Perseverance Through the Playoffs

"Many people don't realize the time and energy involved in playing until December, but for our girls it's become the norm and something very special. As the playoffs take off we ramp up the halftime shows; we acknowledge the excitement of playoffs with a pep rally weekly which means a new pep rally dance. We also try to perform a new field routine weekly knowing that could be the final performance of the year and we want it to be our best. This requires continual practice, the giving up of possibly six or more Saturdays and this is all combined with our other fall

projects, like tryouts. The girls perform for more than 60,000 people. They've traveled around the state, performed in all of the big stadiums in Texas, and made memories that will last a lifetime."

Bittersweet Memories

"In 1994, Jamy Grelle, a senior cheerleader, was diagnosed with cancer and passed away one week later. She touched my life and many others in so many ways and her death changed us forever. Losing a student was devastating for me, our team, and our school but it reinforced the importance of living each day to its fullest and to treat people with respect and admiration. Jamy taught me to be more patient and to keep life's balance in check. Almost 10 years later, I lost another student at the beginning of practice. Sara Krauss, a junior Brigade member, died of an undetected heart disease. Sara's quiet demeanor and beautiful smile reminded me to listen with my heart. Both of these young ladies left a mark on my life."

Proudest Moments as a Director

"They come from watching my students succeed and watching them mentor younger performers. From wearing pink proudly to help find a cure for breast cancer, or waving a flag on the overpass as veterans ride for the cause. They are maturing into beautiful, successful, young adults. Teaching is a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week responsibility. It's not a job, it's a lifestyle. The rewards are immeasurable. I've truly been blessed."

Retirement Rumors

"Well I hear rumors every April that I'm retiring. I'm not sure if that's wishful thinking or what, but I love my job and continue to enjoy working with this very special program!"

Renée Zellweger as a Student

"She was extremely talented and kind of shy, but a great personality. She was always smiling. Renée was a member of the first varsity squad that qualified to compete for the NCA National Championship. She actually competed twice, she was an awesome flyer!" **KM**



Henson was Renée Zellweger's cheer coach in 1988

Getting to Know Patty Henson

Has been to seven of the eight state Katy High School championships.

Adopted her son Ross from Ukraine in 2002. He is now in the Katy theatre program and is the voice of the Katy halftime show.

Enjoys all water sports including snorkeling, scuba diving, swimming, jet skiing, and more.

Originally from the San Antonio area, she now loves all things Historic Katy!

Her parents are avid Tiger fans and spend three or four days a week in Katy to attend the games.

Hates housework but enjoys yard work.



Photo by Amanda Walton

REUNITED WITH RENÉE

Recently Renée Zellweger (Katy HS class of 1988) came to the school for former teacher, Ron Mattson retirement party and Patty was able to visit with her again. "Seeing her at Mr. Mattson's retirement party was awesome. It proved that she is still an amazing young lady! She was extremely humble and gracious, and could not have been friendlier. She was exactly like she was in high school!"